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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the results of introducing parts of the systematic communication training described by Carkhuff into one course of a traditional Master's degree program in counseling. Fifteen graduate students received approximately 15 1/2 hours of training and practice in facilitative communication skills. Thirty-nine undergraduate students made up two control groups. Counseling students in the training group made significant increases in both written and videotaped responses. Students in the control groups made no gains. Changes in dogmatism scores and the relationship between dogmatism and level of communication were also examined. Significant changes in dogmatism scores or meaningful patterns of communication were not found. The study offers suggestions for designing a modest but potentially effective program for increasing counselor trainees' communication skills. (Author/WS)

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INCREASING COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN A TRADITIONAL MASTER'S DEGREE COUNSELING PROGRAM

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The development of effective communication skills on the part of counselor trainees is an obviously important objective in a counselor education program. High levels of communication skills on the part of the counselor have been showed to be related to positive client outcomes (Carkhuff & Berenson, 1967; Truax & Carkhuff, 1967). In recent years Carkhuff (1969, 1971b) has demonstrated that such skills can be taught in a systematic didactic-experiential program focusing on the core facilitative and initiative conditions of a helping relationship. The core conditions described by Carkhuff include empathy, respect, concreteness, genuineness, confrontation and immediacy (Carkhuff, 1969).

To date most of the programs which have reported success in training effective counselors as well as other human relations helpers in the systematic program described by Carkhuff have been outside of university counselor education programs (Carkhuff, 1969, 1971a, 1971b; Mitchell, Rubin, Bogarth & Wyrick, 1971). It is certainly appropriate, even critical, that effective helpers be trained in a variety of situations regardless of the university

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affiliation of the training. Since, however, the great majority of certified school counselors, as well as many counselor in other agencies, continue to come from university and college programs, it is important to integrate into their curriculum training programs of demonstrated success.

Citing the poor performance of many master's degree-level professional counselors who had not been systematically trained, Truax (1970) has urged that research knowledge on systematic training must be put to work in counselor education. There is, however, very little information in the literature on the results of incorporating into university counselor education programs systematic training in the core facilitative and initiative conditions. Describing the results of a special program of didactic-experiential experiences for experienced counselors, Truax and Lister (1971) reported that twelve counselors gained significantly in accurate empathy following a 40-hour training program. In studies focusing on the level of functioning of the trainers rather than the training itself, Pierce and Schauble (1970, 1971) reported that interns and practicum students who had supervisors functioning at high levels on the core facilitative conditions increased significantly in the same conditions, whereas students with low functioning supervisors made no significant gains. In a study designed to measure changes in both facilitative skills and personality variables, Martin and Carkhuff (1968) found that 14 counseling practicum students who had received a didactic-experiential training in discrimination and communication skills made significant gains in both interpersonal functioning and various personality variables.

In addition to the importance of communication skills to counseling effectiveness, there is evidence suggesting that open-mindedness, or the lack of dogmatism, is also related to counselor effectiveness (Mezzano, 1969;

Walton & Sweeney, 1969). If both high level communication skills and open-mindedness are related to effective counseling, it is reasonable to conjecture (a) there is a positive relationship between the level of communication skill and the degree of open-mindedness, (b) effective training in one will facilitate positive gains in the other, and (c) effective training in both will increase the probability of successful counselor preparation. Betz and Osborne (1971) found evidence that open-mindedness can increase over the long period of an entire counselor education program. Foulds (1969) reported a positive correlation between facilitative skills and attributes of self-actualization, but in the only published study on the relationship between dogmatism per se and the ability to communicate facilitative conditions, he found no significant relationship (Foulds, 1971).

The present study was designed primarily to assess the effects of an initial effort to introduce into a traditional master's degree program for counselors an extended period of systematic training in the core facilitative conditions of empathy, respect, concreteness and genuineness. A secondary purpose of the study was to examine any changes in dogmatism that occurred over the course of the training and any correlation between levels of communication and degrees of open-mindedness.

Method

Subjects. Subjects in the study were 15 graduate students enrolled in a course on counseling theory and practice and 66 undergraduate students enrolled in two tests and measurements courses. The 15 graduate students composed the training group and all were master's degree candidates in guidance and counseling. There were 11 females and 4 males. All students

had already completed at least one other course in guidance and counseling; most had completed three or more courses. No true control group was available. The 33 students in one section of tests and measurements served as one quasi-control group and the 30 in the other section served as a second quasi-control group (Campbell & Stanley, 1963). Because of incorrectly completed forms, data on one student from the experimental group, 13 from the first control group, and 11 from the second control group had to be discarded. Results, therefore, were based on data from 14 students (11 females and 3 males) in the experimental group, 20 (10 females and 10 males) in the first quasi-control group and 19 (10 females and 9 males) in the second quasi-control group.

Course Treatment. The training which the 15 graduate counseling students received was part of a three credit-hour, one semester course in counseling theory and practice. The training generally followed the systematic didactic-experiential training described by Carkhuff (1969, 1970). More specifically, the course was divided generally into two parts. The first part consisted of five classes or approximately 13 hours of systematic training in the facilitative communication skills of empathy, respect, genuineness and concreteness, with an emphasis on empathy, genuineness and concreteness. For example, students were trained to discriminate between low and high empathic statements. Training in communication first focused on accurate communication of feeling, then accurate communication of feeling and content with an emphasis on specificity of content. As students roleplayed in counseling situations they were constantly given feedback by the instructor and other students. Extended roleplay situations provided students with the opportunity to give higher levels of empathic responses. As skill in

communication increased, students began to share real concerns; at this point there was increasing emphasis on genuineness in communication. The initiative conditions of direct confrontation and immediacy were briefly explained and demonstrated but not given the same systematic treatment as the other conditions. The remaining 10 classes of the course were used primarily for a discussion of theory and issues. However, the first 15 minutes of each of these classes was used for continued practice in the communication skills. The class was divided into five groups of three students each. The students in each group rotated in the roles of client, counselor and observer. Thus in addition to the 13 hours spent in training initially, approximately two and a half more hours were spent in small group practice.

Research strongly indicates that trainees' growth in the core communicative skills is in large part a function of the level at which the trainer is operating (Carkhuff, 1967, 1969). The course instructor in this experiment was given global ratings to written responses by a rater high in discriminative skills. The rater, who has had high interrater reliabilities with other raters in other situations, thought he was rating a student's responses. On the five-point scale explained below the instructor in this case was given an overall rating of 3.3.

During the introduction to the course, it was explained that increased open-mindedness was an indirect goal of the course. However, there was no direct systematic effort to increase the open-mindedness of the students.

The subjects in the quasi-control groups were undergraduate students in two tests and measurements classes. Although the instructor for the two control classes was a master's level experienced counselor whose practicum work was based on the facilitative conditions of counseling as described by

Carkhuff, the work in these classes focused primarily on cognitive material related to tests and measurements.

Criterion Measures. The level of interpersonal functioning was determined by ratings of written responses to stimulus statements on a student form for obtaining a communication index of interpersonal functioning (Carkhuff, 1969; Kratochvil, Carkhuff, & Berenson, 1969). For this study a rating of overall functioning was used. A rating of overall functioning is a composite assessment of the dimensions of accurate empathy, respect, concreteness, genuineness, confrontation and immediacy. These dimensions are operationally defined on the Scales for Assessment of Interpersonal Functioning (Carkhuff, 1969). The scale ranges from level I when none of the conditions are communicated to any noticeable degree to level V when all the conditions are fully communicated. Level III on these scales is considered the minimally effective level of communication.

All students in the counseling course and in both the quasi-control groups gave written responses to student stimulus responses at the beginning and end of their respective courses during Fall, 1971. In addition to written responses, at the end of their course all counseling students spent 10 minutes counseling a coached client. These counseling sessions were videotaped. All written responses were typed and put in random order. Videotaped responses were rated independently from the tapes by three trained raters and written responses by two of the raters. A single communication score for both the written and videotaped responses was derived by averaging the ratings of the three and two raters respectively.

The Dogmatism Scale, Form E (Rokeach, 1960) was used to assess open-mindedness. This scale was administered to all students at the beginning and end of their courses.

Results

Interrater reliability for the three judges who rated the final videotaped sessions with the coached client was .89. Interrater reliability for the two judges rating written responses was .82.

Table 1 shows all precourse and postcourse mean scores and standard deviations for written and videotaped responses. Analysis of variance showed there were no significant difference between any of the groups at the beginning of the study. At the end of the treatment, analysis of variance showed that there was a significant difference between the three on written responses ($p < .001$). The three posttest written responses were compared by a modified t test, showing that the counseling students' scores were significantly higher than either control group ($p < .001$) with neither control group differing significantly from the other. A t test also showed that in the case of written responses the counseling students had gained significantly by the end of the course ($p <$,001). In the case of the videotaped responses to the coached client, t tests showed that although the counseling students' written responses were significantly better than their taped responses ($p < .01$), nevertheless the taped responses were significantly better than their original written responses ($p < .01$) and the final written responses of the control group students ($p < .01$).

Insert Table 1 about here

In the case of dogmatism scores, there were no significant differences between groups before or after the treatment, and there were no significant changes by any of the groups. Pearson product-moment correlations were computed for all three groups separately on pre and postcourse communication and dogmatism scores. Only three of seven correlations were significantly greater than zero. These included dogmatism scores in relation to pretest written responses for counseling students (.61), posttest videotaped responses of counseling students (-.65) and posttest written responses of the second control group (.22).

Discussion

Results indicate that the systematic training in communication skills for counseling students enabled these students to make singificant gains in writing helpful responses to client problems. Although the mean score for the treatment group was slightly less than the minimally effective level, examination of individual scores showed that five students obtained ratings of three or slightly better and all other students obtained ratings between 2.5 and 3. These scores represent a substantial improvement over pretreatment scores in which all but two students scored below 1.5.

Counseling students also made significant gains in terms of responses in a simulated counseling situation. However, the mean score in this case was still quite low, representing performances inadequate to achieve positive client outcomes. The discrepancy between the counseling students' final written and taped responses may have occured for one of several reasons. Students were unscreened and all but one were initially functioning at very low levels, a factor affecting outcome (Carkhuff & Berenson, 1967). Although the students

had extensive opportunity for roleplaying, their session with the coached client was their first helping relationship with someone other than their fellow students. The newness of the situation appeared to make several of them unduly nervous. The coached client situation was also the first time they had been videotaped and some appeared mildly unnerved by the situation. The amount of the training they received may have made it possible for them to respond adequately in the unthreatening and unrushed situation of writing responses, but the limited amount of practice in the class and the lack of any practice with coached or real clients may have made it difficult for them to react and respond quickly in a new, contrived situation.

The failure to obtain any positive changes in open-mindedness is in general agreement with Mezzano's (1969) findings. The lack of any systematic correlation between dogmatism scores and level of communication is in agreement with Fould's (1971) negative findings. Since Betz and Osborne (1971) did find significant positive change for students over the period of a full master's degree counseling program, it is possible that extended systematic training with considerable opportunity for practice may more effectively alter a trainee's dogmatism scores in relation to his level of communication.

This study does indicate that it is possible to introduce successful systematic communication training into a traditionally structured master's degree program for counselors without an initial upheaval in the whole program. While the study lacked the proper controls of other counselor training groups, there is evidence that the program into which this training was inserted, as well as some other counselor and therapy training programs (Carkhuff & Berenson, 1967; Truax, 1970), have graduated counselors who were less than

minimally effective in interpersonal functioning. Where such ineffectiveness exists, the systematic training program described by Carkhuff (1972, 1971b) can be a highly effective tool in the hands of a high functioning trainer.

Although the treatment group in this study made significant gains, the relative lowness of the final scores, especially with the coached client, indicate that it had weaknesses. It is very probable that the training time was too short. It is the author's opinion that within the same three credit hour course twice as much time could be spent in training in communication without significantly decreasing the student's final knowledge of the fundamentals of important theories and issues. This approach is presently being tried. In addition to spending more time in training, students also need to have some practice with real or coached clients and some familiarity with being videotaped. An adaptation of the pre-practicum laboratory experience, using real clients and various videotaping techniques, described by Wittmer and Lister (1972), would be useful in generalizing students' skills. For example, a traditional counseling theory and practice class could be turned into a four-hour laboratory course with a laboratory fee to be used to obtain paid clients for counseling students (Befus & Miller, 1970). Outside class assignments would then include several videotaped counseling sessions with the paid clients. A combination of these approaches appears to be an appropriate step forward for relatively small master's degree programs aimed at graduating more effective counselors.

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Table 1

Communication Scores

	Counseling Students (N=14)		Quasi-Control I (N=20)		Quasi-Control III (N=19)	
	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD
Pretest	1.43	0.42	1.26	0.10	1.25	0.10
Posttest	2.83	0.21	1.24	0.09	1.29	0.11
Videotape	2.12	0.40				